

Introductory Statement

by John F. Finklea*

Technical information of vital importance to public health, to environmental protection, and to economic well being must be more readily available to the public at large, to public interest groups, to industry and to government if our democratic society is to function for the common good. Hidden information can only serve narrow interests in our society, and in the long run hidden information may not serve even those interests well.

Recent compilations indicate that the Federal government is expending in this fiscal year about 54 million dollars for all air pollution research and that the three largest automobile companies spent over 700 million dollars in 1973 on emission controls alone. Does our society have adequate access to the information gathered by these and other

research efforts? My own personal opinion is that our nation does not and that we have not developed either the formal institutions or the informal mechanisms to assure the degree of access necessary to protect public health and to meet our national goals of environmental protection and economic well being.

How much could information now hidden assist our national effort to achieve national environmental controls? I do not know the answer to this question, but it is apparent that the information needs are very large and that our nation should strive to optimize its use of limited research resources.

With these thoughts in mind, the organizations contributing to the present program should be encouraged to pursue their policies of openness. We also hope that others who have not chosen the path of candor in the public interest will choose to do so in the future and that information now considered proprietary can be made available in a timely fashion.

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